

great musical resources, would be happy to receive a lady as Boarder. Address, Professor, 21, Maddox Street, Regent Street."

The advertiser might as well have made a startling heading at once—"Insanity Curable by Music!" or some such catch line; for this is the bare hard meaning of the announcement. There can be no objection to the simple announcement of a private asylum; but we must protest against these highly absurd advertisements, which are calculated to defraud the public; and we are glad to find that Dr. Forbes Winslow, in his late presidential address to the Association of Asylum Proprietors, denounced them in the strongest possible terms.

## Reports of Societies.

### EPIDEMIOLOGICAL SOCIETY.

MONDAY, JULY 6TH, 1857.

JOHN SNOW, M.D., in the Chair.

HISTORY OF GAOL FEVER IN ENGLAND. BY FRANCIS C. WEBB, M.D.

THE paper was introduced by some remarks on the impossibility of any class of society being subjected for a length of time to the causes of disease, without final participation by the rest of the community in the results. The testimony of Lord Bacon was adduced, to the frequent occurrence of disease, taking its origin among prisoners "long and close and nastily kept"; that such occurrences were not limited to his age, is abundantly proved by extracts from the writings of Howard and Neild, illustrative of the state of prisons in the eighteenth and early part of the nineteenth centuries, and of the etiology of gaol fever. The appreciable causes which produced the disease were, the crowding of human beings in small dungeons, the withdrawal of a proper supply of water, the want of nourishment and exercise, the operation of a sanguinary and ill regulated penal code, and consequent mental depression. Reference was then made to various acts of legislation on the subject of gaol fever.

The first outbreak of gaol disease of which we have an account, took place in 1414, when the prisons of Newgate and Ludgate were severely visited. In 1522, an outbreak took place at the sessions held in the castle of Cambridge. This was followed in 1577, by the celebrated "Black Assize" at Oxford, when 510 persons were infected and died from July 6th to August 10th. A description of the symptoms of the disease was given from the accounts of Cogan and Stowe, and also the testimony of the former as to the exemption of women and children. Until a late period, the gaol distemper was popularly believed to affect men alone. That this in the eighteenth century was not founded on fact, is proved by the testimony of Pringle and Lettsom. The "sickness of the house" in the Queen's Bench Prison in 1579, was made the occasion of a petition to Queen Elizabeth. A similar outbreak to that at Oxford took place at Exeter in 1585. A scantiness of detail as to the disease in prisons in the seventeenth century was accounted for, by the difficulty of separating the prison element from the general sum of causes producing the pestilential fever so frequently rife during the civil wars; by the succession of epidemics of plague, and the frequency with which petechial fever was confounded with that disease; and by the political excitement of the period, which probably interfered with the correct chronicling of such events. Gaol fever was found to prevail in the eighteenth century, whenever from any cause the gaols became crowded: as in 1730, from the unparalleled amount of crime; in 1749, on the conclusion of the peace of Aix-la-Chapelle; and under similar circumstances in 1783.

Allusions were made to the outbreak at Taunton and Exeter in 1730; to the state of the Irish prisons in 1740-41; and to the disease in the gaols of Limerick and Tralee. The distemper was conveyed by some deserters, who had been confined in prison, to the Duke of Cumberland's army at Inverness in 1746. The author then gave Pringle's account of that epidemic. An outbreak occurred at the Old Bailey sessions in 1750, when, curiously enough, those to the right of the Lord Mayor generally escaped; the reason assigned being that a stream of air from the window directed the *materies morbi* to the other side

of the court. A great benefit resulted from a ventilator constructed at Newgate, and worked by a machine in the manner of a windmill, in 1752. Seven of eleven workmen employed in erecting the ventilator contracted the fever; and by one of them, a whole family was infected. Notice was then made of its conveyance from Exeter gaol to the town of Axminster in 1755. It prevailed in 1761 amongst the prisoners of war at Porchester and Winchester; at Warwick and Bedford in 1772, spreading in the latter instance to the town. Dr. Lettsom describes an outbreak in 1773, in Long Lane, Aldersgate Street, the fever being brought there by a person who had contracted it in Newgate. Outbreaks occurred in Aylesbury Gaol in 1773-74; at Dublin in 1775; at Hertford in 1776. It subsided in the borough and county gaols until 1783; when, part of the forces being disbanded, the prisons were again crowded, and fever reappeared. At Worcester, it appeared in a malignant form, and was thence conveyed to Droitwich.

The author proceeded to give Pringle's and Lind's testimony as to the influence of prisons as sources of infection to the navy and army. The disease was also carried by transported felons to the penal settlements in America.

The fever which broke out amongst the Spanish prisoners in 1780, appeared to be distinguished from the English gaol distemper by the general absence of eruption and of head symptoms.

Dr. Webb stated his opinion of the nature of the true gaol distemper. It was typhus fever in its most characteristic form, identical with hospital and ship fever, and the pestilential fever of Sydenham. When suddenly fatal, which it frequently was, it corresponded with the *typhus siderans* of authors. Great light has been thrown by the subject on the etiology of typhus fever; it has entirely disappeared as a gaol disorder.

The author concluded his paper by a few remarks on the encouragement afforded by such a retrospect to philanthropists and promoters of sanitary reform.

## Association Intelligence.

### LETTERS AND COMMUNICATIONS.

Letters or communications for the JOURNAL should be addressed to Dr. WYNTER, Coleherne Court, South Kensington, S.W.

Letters regarding the business department of the JOURNAL, and corrected proofs, should be sent to 37, Great Queen Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields, W.C.

### ADMISSION OF MEMBERS, AND PAYMENT OF SUBSCRIPTIONS.

THE General Secretary of the British Medical Association begs to call the attention of members to the Laws regarding the ADMISSION OF MEMBERS, and the PAYMENT of their SUBSCRIPTIONS.

"*Admission of Members.* Any qualified medical practitioner, not disqualified by any bye-law, who shall be recommended as eligible by any *three* members, shall be admitted a member at any time by the Committee of Council, or by the Council of any Branch."

"*Subscriptions.* The subscription to the Association shall be One Guinea annually; and each member, on paying his subscription, shall be entitled to receive the publications of the Association for the current year. The subscription shall date from the 1st January in each year, and shall be considered as due unless notice of withdrawal be given in writing to the Secretary on or before the 25th of December previous."

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PHILIP H. WILLIAMS, *General Secretary.*

Worcester, July 1857.